

Helping Canadians with Disability/Chronic Disease Get Physically Active: Tip Sheets for Intermediaries

For Canadians with a disability, regular physical activity may be even more important than it is for the rest of the population. For a person with a disability, an active lifestyle can open doors to increased health, social inclusion and self-empowerment - doors which might otherwise remain closed. Access to physical activity can eliminate the likelihood of acquiring secondary health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease. Being active builds resiliency and can provide an all-important outlet for a person with a disability.

These tip sheets are designed to provide general information in support of Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines, developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology.

AGING

General Information

Facts and Figures

- The Canadian population is aging. Seniors are the demographic that is growing most quickly;
- In 2011, the median age of Canadians was 39 years, compared to 26 years in 1971;
- Aging can limit or restrict movement and interest in areas of mobility. A lack of mobility is among the leading types of disability reported;
- The number of Canadians aged 65 or older is expected to double over the next 25 years;
- With a population that is growing older, it is important to consider all ages and abilities when planning for inclusive healthy active living programs.

What is Aging?

Aging is a term which describes the process that encompasses a decline in productivity, performance and health over time. As we age, we inevitably become frailer, susceptible to age-related degenerative disease, and more vulnerable to acquiring a disability.

In 2006, Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) revealed that 14.3% of Canadians reported having a disability. Data collected through the survey indicates that as Canadians age, the prevalence of disability increases. In 2006, 3.7% of children under the age of 15 were identified as having a disability, compared to 33% among individuals aged between 65 and 74, and 56.3% among those aged 75 or older. By 2026, it is estimated that the majority of Canadians with a disability will be aged 65 or older. Increased physical activity makes sense for everyone but especially in the context of an aging population of Canadians with a disability.

Impact of Aging

Age is an inevitable stage of life which effects each and every one of us.

Following are some of the typical changes which can occur as a person ages. However, it should be noted that physical activity can go a long way towards slowing the decline that is associated with age, and to providing an individual with the tools to manage the aging process. Regardless of their physical ability or degree of health, older adults can benefit a great deal from regular physical activity. Even if an individual has difficulty with standing or walking, they can benefit through exercise. These individuals have more to lose from being sedentary.

Some of the common factors that are associated with aging, and which regular exercise can help to alleviate, include:

- The decline of physical strength and fitness;
- Increased vulnerability to illness;
- Compromised balance;
- Susceptibility to diseases including diabetes, heart disease, breast and colon cancer, and osteoporosis;
- Feelings of depression, low mood, negative self-esteem, and reduced cognitive function.

Working with an Older Adult

Tips for Getting Active

The benefits that an older adult can gain from physical activity will largely depend on their starting point, and the degree of effort which they are willing to put into an exercise program. The choice of physical activity should be matched with the individual's needs and their abilities. The individual will move and participate in their own way. Each and every person should have the opportunity to get actively involved in community programs, fitness and health initiatives. The role of physical activity providers in creating a welcoming and safe environment to accommodate older adults can not be understated.

When working with an older adult, consider the following:

- Create a welcoming environment – customer service focus;
- Ask the individual what their needs and interests are – never assume;
- Reminder: privacy/disclosure policies ensure individuals share information at their discretion and comfort;
- Focus on what the individual can do rather than what they cannot;
- Think safety first;
- Encourage the individual to consult with a medical professional prior to starting a physical activity program;
- An individual's impaired mobility could have been the result of an accident, injury or progressive condition – be patient and supportive;

- Consult with resource agencies with expertise in areas of inclusive physical activity – training or professional development materials may be beneficial;
- Ensure staff and volunteers receive adequate training to be able to deliver quality customer service, gain equipment knowledge/use and learn about available resources – on/off-site.

Teaching and Communication Technique

- Offer assistance and support as required or when asked;
- Reminder – do not touch an individual or their assistive device or service animal without their consent;
- Create space for easy movement and participation;
- Match the individual with activities which meet their needs and abilities. Some individuals may be able to swim a mile or engage in a vigorous aerobics class, while for others, a slow walk may be enough;
- Make it fun – having fun and socializing are important benefits to physical activity experienced by people who are active;
- Develop activities at the level of the individual, focusing on endurance, balance, strength and flexibility. Enhancing these areas can be helpful with everyday activities: i.e., pushing grandchildren on swings, carrying a full laundry basket, walking up and down stairs, or bending to tie shoes;
- When leading activities outdoors, ensure participants wear sun screen, protective clothing, sunglasses and a hat;
- Make it interesting – exercise and every day activities, such as gardening or walking a dog, can easily go together.

Physical Activity Tips and Modifications

- Ask the individual to consult a medical practitioner prior to involvement;
- Provide a facility without barriers to participation, thus creating access to the venue, equipment or activity (this could include: accessible parking spaces, ramp access or flat access to the front door, remove obstacles in hallways – signage, garbage/recycling bins, automatic or wide frame doorways to enter/exit)
- Allocate additional staff or volunteers to the area where the participant will be taking part in an activity, where possible;
- Ask first, do not assume that the individual needs or would like help;
- Avoid slippery surfaces and raised obstructions;
- If available, provide adapted equipment;
- As with every individual, other considerations should be discussed (i.e. pain, fatigue and the individual's expectations).

Resources:

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability – www.ala.ca

Variety Village – www.varietyvillage.ca

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada: Canadians in Context - Aging Population / Indicators of Well-being in Canada - <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1421956465811/1421956529797>

Statistics Canada. *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006: Tables*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007 (Cat. No. 89-628-XIE - No. 003).

What is Aging? Aging - Disease Connection - <http://longevity-science.org/Aging.html>.

Exercise & Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide from the National Institute on Aging - www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/exercise-physical-activity-your-everyday-guide-national-institute-aging/chapter-1.

*This project would not have been possible without the expertise of our partners. ALACD would like to sincerely thank these organizations for working with us to develop this resource: the **Ontario Blind Sports Association**, **Variety Village**, the **National Network for Mental Health**, and the **Learning Disabilities Association of Canada**.*

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability

© 2013